

Farmers Bill of Rights Resolution

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The problem. Large corporations and foreign interests have steadily monopolized the country's agricultural sector, leaving little room for the family farmers and ranchers who are the backbone of agriculture in the United States. Farmers now sell into an ever more concentrated marketplace that has reduced the prices they receive for their crops and livestock and has contributed to collapsing farm income.

The solution. This resolution outlines ten basic rights for family farmers and ranchers that everyone should have access to. The Farmers Bill of Rights resolution highlights the critical needs and fundamental agricultural rights of America's rural, Native Nations, acequia communities and historically underrepresented farmers. The resolution aims to ensure fairness in farm and food markets so rural communities and new generations of farmers can thrive.

Background

Corporate concentration and abusive practices in America's food and farm sector are at detrimental highs, which harms consumers, rural communities and family farmers and ranchers, including historically underserved farmers and ranchers. These harmful practices are diminishing the availability of seed choice; limiting the accessibility of domestic farming lands; increasing food prices; and hindering access to traditional foodways and agricultural practices. Increasing farm loan delinquencies, increasing farm debt, decreasing incomes, and deteriorating overall conditions for family farmers and ranchers have caused farm foreclosures and chapter twelve bankruptcies to steadily rise.

In addition, agriculture, forestry, and other land use activities are resulting in the ongoing deterioration of food systems, including irreversible impacts to the traditional farming practices and foodways of indigenous peoples and their lands. Monopolization and an increase of large corporations and foreign interests in America's farming sector, combined with a changing climate, creates an unprecedented negative impact on the regional economic strength and security of rural and Tribal communities.

The Farmers Bill of Rights:

(1) RIGHT TO FAIR, OPEN MARKETS. There must be a competitive open marketplace to buy seeds, fertilizer and other goods, and to sell produce, livestock, and meat for all people. It has become nearly impossible for independent farmers, processors, seed suppliers, mechanics, and other rural businesses to compete with multinational monopolies. Farmers need strong antitrust safeguards.

(2) RIGHT TO FEED THEIR COMMUNITY. Multinational corporations have taken control of the country's food system by shutting out independent processing and distribution businesses, consequentially locking farmers out of their local markets and denying domestic consumers local, regional, and culturally traditional foods. In the United States, Native Americans suffer from the highest rates of food insecurity with African Americans and Hispanic communities more food insecure than the national average, which could be remedied through investment in local food systems, greater regulatory flexibility, and Tribal self-governance programs.

(3) RIGHT TO FAIR CAPITAL. With the loss of community and regional banks, coupled with the extraction of wealth from rural communities by large corporations, farmers and local businesses cannot access the capital necessary to operate. Congress must ensure all farmers, regardless of background, can access the credit and capital they need. Including, Native American producers and Tribal agricultural enterprises that often must contract with Federal agencies for resources, and African American farmers who have endured historical discrimination accessing farm credit.

(4) RIGHT TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES. If large corporations want to purchase land and operate megafarms, they have a duty to protect the earth's soil, water, and natural resources, as rural and indigenous farmers have for generations. This includes the protection of acequias that sustain accessibility to water, local agriculture, and traditional irrigation practices. Corporate megafarms have a duty to support conservation by following reasonable standards for aquifer use, manure storage, and other land-use guidelines. Preserving land-based agricultural resources is vital to beginning to mitigate the impacts of climate change and preserve resources for both the tradition of diversified rural family farming and the cultural sustainability of indigenous agricultural communities.

(5) RIGHT TO LOCAL LAND CONTROL, PROPERTY RIGHTS, & PROTECTION OF TRIBAL LANDS AND SOVEREIGNTY. Counties and other local governments should have the ability to pass and enforce ordinances regulating the size, placement, and scope of megafarms to protect the value of rural family farmers' land and the surrounding environment. African American farmers and other historically underserved farmers and ranchers should retain their land ownership and rights. Tribal governments are sovereign nations with the inherent right to independently control their lands through self-governance programs to safeguard traditional foods and medicines for their citizens' wellbeing and preservation of ceremonial practices of American Indian and Alaskan Natives, including the expansion of historically diminished indigenous hunting, fishing, and gathering rights.

(6) RIGHT TO FOOD SECURITY. Foreign ownership hurts family farmers and ranchers and raises national security concerns. A strict cap on foreign ownership of farms, farmland, and agribusinesses should be set to ensure that all American farmers can access domestic farm land.

(7) RIGHT TO REPAIR. Huge corporations and their Wall Street backers have gone so far as to prevent local businesses and farmers from fixing their own tractors and equipment, forcing them to pay corporate technicians to make all repairs. A farmer should have the right to fix their own equipment as they see fit.

(8) RIGHT TO TRANSPARENT LABELING. A farmer should be able to label their food accurately and transparently including strong country of origin labeling standards.

(9) RIGHT TO RURAL OPPORTUNITY. Monopolies have hollowed out local economies and taken away the traditional pathways of opportunity for free enterprise that helped communities thrive. No farmer should have to choose between continuing to operate their farm and getting access to good schools and health care. No farmer should have to choose between farming and providing a future for their children. Farmers need the right to basic services in rural communities.

(10) RIGHT TO PRESERVE A DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF FARMERS & FARMING PRACTICES. Congress must ensure that historically underserved farmers and ranchers have fair opportunities in the market, a seat at the table in policy development, access to culturally relevant training and technical assistance, and equal treatment by all Federal agencies.